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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 BEIJING 000358

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [CH](#)

SUBJECT: TIBET: CHINA FEELING PUBLIC PRESSURE TO REACT
STRONGLY TO POTUS-DALAI LAMA MEETING, CONTACTS SAY

REF: BEIJING 314

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor
Aubrey Carlson. Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Increased expression of nationalistic sentiment and public anger over recent Taiwan arms sales mean the PRC leadership will need to somehow "punish" the United States if the President meets with the Dalai Lama, according to several contacts. A Tibetan academic at a Communist Party-run think tank said that, at the very least, the meeting will make dialogue between China and the Dalai Lama's representatives more difficult. In contrast, Tibetan monks we spoke with said they were "very happy" that President Obama would receive the Dalai Lama and claimed that the overwhelming majority of Tibetans in China know about the upcoming meeting and fully support it. In private conversations, some CCP and foreign policy officials have told us that China is less susceptible to international pressure on the Tibet issue and should "ignore" the meeting, as China's protests only increase the Dalai Lama's status. End Summary.

"First Warn, Then React"

¶2. (C) Ma Rong (protect), a Peking University sociologist who frequently advises the Communist Party's United Front Work Department (UFWD) on Tibet policy, described the Chinese leadership as under intense pressure from "Han nationalist" sentiment that has grown stronger due to recent years' ethnic unrest in Tibet and Xinjiang. The Chinese public, he told PolOff February 9, held very negative views of the Dalai Lama, blamed the Chinese government for being too soft on minorities, and did not support dialogue between the UFWD and the Dalai Lama's representatives (reftel). Adding to the pressure, high-ranking CCP leaders were preoccupied with jockeying for succession position in the run-up to the 18th Party Congress in 2012. In such an atmosphere, Ma argued, there was no tolerance within the leadership for moderate views on Tibet or minority policy. Much of the Chinese regime's recent international behavior, including its hard line against foreign leaders meeting the Dalai Lama, was driven primarily by this combination of domestic nationalistic pressure and competition for power.

¶3. (C) Ma said that China had adopted a policy of "warn, then punish" toward the POTUS-Dalai Lama meeting. He predicted that China's reaction would be more severe than following President Bush's attendance at the October 2007 Congressional Gold Medal ceremony for the Dalai Lama. Ma pointed to a February 2 statement by UFWD Executive Vice Minister

Zhu Weiqun that there would be "serious damage" (yanzhong pohuai) to bilateral relations should U.S. leaders meet with the Dalai Lama. China's reaction would not be restricted to mere rhetoric, though he could only speculate about the specific steps China might take. Ma said China might show its displeasure over the meeting by reducing cooperation on security issues important to the United States. Domestically, China might choose to make high-profile arrests of Tibetan monks after the meeting and to increase punishments given to Tibetan political prisoners: "A sentence that would have been two years may become 10 years." Ultimately, Ma said, Tibetans would be the "victims" of the leadership's anger over the meeting.

14. (C) Zhang Yong, Managing Editor of the Global Times' English-language edition (the Global Times is a nationalistic tabloid that has given heavy coverage to China's official protests over the meeting) and a former reporter and editor of People's Daily, told PolOff February 9 that he thought the Chinese government reaction to the President's meeting with the Dalai Lama would be relatively restrained: "loud but short-lived." He said the Chinese government was motivated to repair U.S.-China relations and therefore would not take concrete action to "punish" the United States.

Chinese Government "under Public Pressure"

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15. (C) In a meeting with PolOff February 5, Tanzen Lhundup (Danzeng Lunzhu), Vice Director of the Institute for Sociology and Economics at the Chinese Center for Tibetan Studies, a think tank associated with the UFWD, likewise stressed that Chinese leaders were under public pressure to respond forcefully to the POTUS-Dalai Lama meeting, especially coming so soon after the Taiwan arms sales announcement. He blamed China's media, including Global Times, for whipping up nationalistic sentiment. China's newspapers could provide thoughtful coverage of Iran and North Korea, but became "stupid" (i.e., emotional and jingoistic) when reporting on Tibet. Emphasizing that he was speaking in a personal capacity, Tanzen Lhundup said he understood the domestic political factors at work in the United States that made it difficult for American presidents not to meet with the Dalai Lama. He believed the meeting would cause Tibetans to have unrealistic expectations of a breakthrough in PRC-Dalai Lama talks. Rather than make compromise easier, however, the meeting would harden Chinese attitudes by reinforcing the notion that the Dalai Lama used foreigners to put pressure on Beijing, Tanzen Lhundup said.

"Tibetans Are Very Happy"

16. (S) Several Tibetan monks PolOff spoke with in Beijing expressed overwhelming support for President Obama's decision to meet with the Dalai Lama. Suoang Zhaxi (strictly protect), a monk from Yushu County, Qinghai province, currently studying at a Beijing Buddhist college, told PolOff February 6 that he was "very happy" that the meeting would take place. He had originally invited PolOff to meet him at his school on Beijing's northern outskirts but later asked PolOff to meet him downtown, saying PolOff's presence near the school might invite unwanted attention from authorities. The upcoming meeting, he said, made February a "sensitive time"

for Tibetans, and he had to be cautious about contact with foreigners. He hoped to obtain a "video" of the POTUS-Dalai Lama meeting similar to the video of the 2007 Congressional Gold Medal ceremony, which he said was widely distributed among Tibetans in China.

17. (S) Gebchak Wangdrak Rinpoche (strictly protect), the abbot of a Buddhist nunnery in Nangqian County, Qinghai, told PolOff February 8 that all of the 400 nuns at the nunnery knew about the meeting and were excited about it. He said that Tibetans in southern Qinghai were receiving news about the Dalai Lama's trip to Washington both from the Voice of America's Tibetan service, which is available via satellite radio, and through word of mouth. The Rinpoche dismissed the idea that official anger over the meeting might lead to a deterioration of human rights conditions in Tibet, saying the show of support from the United States was very important to Tibetans. Similarly, Luosang Cicheng Pengcuo (strictly protect), a living Buddha at Lucang Monastery in Guinan County, Qinghai, told PolOff February 6 that "90 percent of Tibetans" in China knew about the upcoming meeting and were happy it would take place.

"China Should Ignore the Dalai Lama"

18. (C) In recent private conversations, some CCP cadres have shrugged off news of the POTUS-Dalai Lama meeting, saying China's growing international clout made it less vulnerable to international pressure on the Tibet issue. Zhang Jianguo (protect), a deputy director of the State Bureau of Foreign Experts, raised the topic of Tibet during a dinner with PolOff February 3. Zhang argued that China paid "too much attention" to the Dalai Lama. The PRC should stop protesting the Dalai Lama's meetings with foreign leaders because "making such a fuss only gives the Dalai Lama more status than he deserves...if President Obama wants to meet him, then so what?" Zhang noted that his ideas were unconventional in the CCP, but he nevertheless felt that China, given its growing international strength, should show more confidence regarding Tibet.

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19. (C) In a February 3 meeting with Chengdu Consul General, Yangling Dorje (protect), a senior Tibetan CCP cadre and the former Chairman of the Tibet Autonomous Region's Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, expressed similar sentiments. China, he said, was now a great power and was too strong a country to be pushed around by the agitation of overseas Tibetans and foreigners. The Global Times' Zhang Yong and Beijing University Assistant Professor Yu Wanli each separately expressed the same sentiments to PolOff February 9. Zhang complained that China's continued "severe overreaction" to international leaders' meetings with the Dalai Lama imposed costs only on China. "We react to his meetings, and our reaction has absolutely no effect at all," he moped. "Better to ignore him."

110. (U) This cable was coordinated with ConGen Chengdu.
HUNTSMAN